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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002062

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [PTER](#) [TBIO](#) [PARM](#) [AM](#) [KPRP](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: BIOLOGICAL WARFARE AND PROLIFERATION

REF: STATE 80982

Classified By: DCM A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S/NF) Armenia does not have an active biological warfare program nor does it have an interest, desire or capability to start one (reftel). The Armenian government has denied ever having a biological warfare program and currently Armenian biological institutes and private companies are struggling with low salaries and lack of new equipment. This significantly hampers their ability to find international and domestic clients to purchase their vaccines, medicines and technological know-how. The Armenian government has instituted strict export laws concerning the export, import and transit of dual-use items. The Armenian emergency management administration stated that protection against biological attack was a lower government priority than preparing for other potential disasters, such as earthquakes, chemical or nuclear accidents. End Summary.

ACQUISITION OF BW-RELATED ITEMS AND EXPERTISE WMDB

12. (S/NF) The MFA's Armen Isrealian and Aram Tanyan, Deputy Head of the Armenian Emergency Management Administration (AEMA), both stated in no uncertain terms that the Armenian government (GOAM) did not conduct any biological warfare research during the Soviet period, that no research is currently underway and that they strongly believed that there was no interest or capability to start a program now. Both explained that it was against Soviet doctrine to have any sensitive defense research located in a Soviet republic which bordered a NATO country. Both also explained that soon after independence, with the terrible economic conditions and lack of electricity, it would have been nearly impossible to start and/or maintain any type of biological weapons program in Armenia. Jean Akopian of the Institute of Microbiology (IM) told us that none of Armenia's chemical or biological institutes were secret closed institutes during the Soviet period, which was a prerequisite to conduct sensitive defense research. Post has no evidence that the GOAM is working with any other country in order to acquire WMDB.

BW-ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT AND ARMENIAN EXPORT CONTROL POLICIES

13. (S/NF) Isrealian told us that in 2003 the GOAM had established an export law modeled on the Australian group principles. This law gives the Armenian export commission multiple tools to turn down any export that has dual-use properties. The commission consists of nine deputy ministers who have the ability to call in scientific experts if needed. The export control law carries penalties of up to eight years in prison and the commission has the legal right to question scientists that were working on biological programs overseas. Isrealian told us that to his knowledge, the GOAM has never exported any biological agents. Isrealian stated that a GOAM concern was that Armenia could become a transit corridor for illegal dual use items for Iran, and therefore, the GOAM purposefully made their export laws as strict as possible. Isrealian told us that after the fall of the Soviet Union, hundreds, if not thousands of qualified Armenian scientists and specialists either emigrated to Europe, America and Russia or simply took up other professions. Isrealian, as well as others in the scientific community, also stated that he had no first hand knowledge of any Armenian scientists who have worked or were currently working on Iranian or other rogue nation biological or other weapons programs. Scientists have told us that oppressive Islamic environments, low pay, perceived low level of science and concerns about working with pariah states have discouraged most if not all Armenian scientists from working in Iran or other rogue nations. The scientists and directors of scientific institutes told us that western grants have helped Armenian scientists stay in Armenia, but more consistent funding from the GOAM will be needed in order to stop good Armenian scientists from emigrating or leaving the field of science altogether.

BW DETECTION, DECONTAMINATION AND MEDICAL CARE

14. (S/NF) After discussions with senior officials at the MOD, the defense attache reported his impression that the MOD has limited chemical, and biological defense capabilities and are placing biological defense at a low priority due to the lack of resources and low perceived threat. The MOD does have one specialized unit, the 21st independent nuclear biological chemical defense battalion, which has approximately 92 soldiers. In order to deploy soldiers to Iraq as part of the coalition, the MOD had formally requested vaccinations against anthrax, typhoid, meningitis and smallpox.

15. (S/NF) AEMA's Tanyan told us that his organization was working with international donors on various disaster relief projects to prepare for possible earthquakes and/or chemical accidents. Tanyan told us that the AEMA does have a nuclear, biological, chemical laboratory where they can test for various chemical, radioactive and biological agents. He also reported that the equipment is from the Soviet era, not up to international standards and does not allow the AEMA to conduct tests quickly. Tanyan stated that AEMA has good specialists in biological, chemical and nuclear disciplines but they do not have the training, language skills and equipment to do international level work. AEMA has a plan to open an local AEMA office in every region of Armenia in order to coordinate with all GOA agencies in the event of a disaster. Tanyan admitted it would be very difficult to outfit all of the offices with modern equipment in order to do any accurate testing. He stated that AEMA was working with local scientific institutes and various government agencies to compile a complete list of biological entities and where and how they were stored in Armenia.

16. (S/NF) Tanyan explained that the AEMA SOP for any outbreaks of biological hazards among crops was to isolate and quarantine the infected area and then burn the crops. AEMA has the same SOP for infected farm animals. Tanyan told us that Armenia has had some outbreaks of dysentery and cholera in the regions outside Yerevan but they were able to contain them quickly. AEMA stated that they currently do not have any biological detection devices and they believed that the GOAM and the MOD were also probably lacking such equipment. AEMA complained that they have very few vaccines on hand and do not even have the minimum stockpiles for ordinary problems such as snakebites and insects.

IMPACT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY AND SECURITY OF RESEARCH PATHOGENS

17. (S/NF) Dr. Harachya Hovhannisyan, a senior biologist at Armenicum, told us that the lack of modern equipment seriously limited the international-level work was being conducted in the field of biotechnology in Armenia. Armenicum, an Armenian biotechnology company currently being funded by Armenian businessmen (allegedly including Minister of Defense Serzh Sargsian) was one of the exceptions. Hovhannisyan told us that Armenicum was working on AIDS vaccines and had sold some medications to Indian clients. Dr. Hovhannisyan stated that Armenicum was guarded by Armenian soldiers, and he felt that this measure had been taken to safeguard the expensive American machinery as well as Sargsian's personal investment. Dr. Akopian of IM explained that IM was currently specializing in sugar substitutes, nitrogen, natural zeolites, and agricultural nitrogen techniques. Akopian told us that they have garnered some interest from the Chinese company Northstar. The Armenian Lysine Plant, Lizin, who had been sanctioned by the Department of State in May of 2002 for two years for the attempted sale of fermenters to Iran, told us that after their sanction expired, they planned to market and sell livestock feed, lysine, vitamins, medicines and sugar substitutes to local domestic companies as well as any interested international clients.

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